

Čri-dharma-maṅgala : A distant echo of the *Lalita-vistara*,—By PAṄḌIT HARA PRASĀD ČĀSTRĪ, M.A.

[Read February, 1895.]

In a paper read in December last,¹ I attempted to prove that the Dharma-pūjā prevalent in Western Bengal is Buddhism, though unconscious.

In the preceding paper I have tried to trace the history of Buddhism from the Muḥammadan conquest down to the present day, and also to show how widely Buddhism is still prevalent in Bengal, though in a form scarcely to be recognized, except by the initiated.

In the present paper I purpose to draw a comparison between the *Čri-dharma-maṅgala*, the hand-book of the Dharma worshippers,—the work chanted under thousands of *Bata* trees on the sacred birthday² of the Buddha,—and the *Lalita-vistara*, or the hand-book of the Buddha's life, according to the Mahāyāna School.

In the *Lalita-vistara*, the Buddha is represented as preaching to gods and Bōdhisattvas in the Tuṣita-heaven. He was then *Caramabhavika*, i.e., about to receive his last birth. There was a discussion where he should be born, it was decided he should be born in the family of Čākya. He enters his mother's womb by the right side. The mother sees miraculous visions. She travails in a garden. A storm disperses her attendants. She holds the branch of a tree, and hangs downward with her face lifted up towards heaven; in that condition the Buddha is born. On the seventh day after his birth, his mother dies. He is named Sarvārtha-siddha by his father. Dēvarṣi, the divine Ṛṣi, Asita comes to see the boy and predicts that he will renounce the world. The Dēvapura Mahēçvara also predicts the same thing. He is nursed by his stepmother, Mahāprajāvatī. He learns to read and write various alphabets from Viçvāmitra, the teacher of boys. He goes to see villages; he falls into a trance under a Jambu tree,

¹ [See the *Proceedings* of the Society, for Dec. 1894, p. 135, where the paper is printed at full length. ED.]

² [The *Vaiçākḥi Pūrṇimā*; See *Proceedings*, p. 137. ED.]

where he is discovered by his father; then he is married; he is examined in his knowledge. He conquers the whole Čākya race by his prowess and marries Gōpā, the daughter of Daṇḍapāṇi. Then comes the well-known story about the four excursions, and his famous renunciation. During his prolonged meditation under the Bō tree at Bōdh-gayā, Māra comes to tempt him, first with an army of terrible demons and then with a host of beautiful damsels. But the Buddha rises superior to the temptations, and succeeds in turning the wheel of law (the *Dharma-cakra*). The *Lalita-vistara* ends here, but there are other works, such as the *Mahāvastu-avadāna*, which give a history of his ministry and of his Nirvāṇa at Kuçinagara.

The *Čri-dharma-maṅgala* begins with the usual salutations to Gaṇeça, Sarasvatī, &c. The real work opens with Dharma, as supreme Brahma, creating Vidhi, Viṣṇu and Čiva. In the beginning of the Kali-yuga, he thinks deeply in his highest heaven that people are not worshipping Dharma. Just at this time Hanumat presents himself before Dharma, and in consultation they determine to send to the earth one of the Apsarases, or dancing girls of Indra's court, in order that she may propagate the worship of Dharma.

This dancing girl is born as the sister of the wife of the king of Gauḍa, the son of the great King Dharma-pāla. Her brother Mahāmada is the minister of the king. The king gives the girl in marriage to Karṇa-sēna, one of his great feudatories, against the wishes of his brother-in-law, and the minister takes a vow of eternal vengeance against his sister and his brother-in-law.

Raṅjāvati the royal sister-in-law, on the advice of Ramāi Paṇḍit, worships Dharma at Cāmpāi, that she may get a mighty son. In order to please the deity, she lays herself down on a piece of plank with iron spikes driven through it, the instrument on which jute is teased by weavers. She immediately dies, and remains dead for three nights. Then there is a storm. Dharma-rāja presents himself before her, and she regains her life and gains the boon she wanted. Lāusēna, her son, is an incarnation of Kaçyapa's son, perhaps Indra. His athletic training is given in detail. The minister of the king of Gauḍa makes many attempts to take his life. Dharma saves him. He is at last summoned to Gauḍa. On his way to the capital, he kills the tiger Kāmadala, in the depopulated city of Jalandara. At Jāmāti and at Gōlāghāṭa, women of all descriptions throw many temptations in his way, but in vain. On his arrival at Gauḍa, the minister contrives to send him on a distant and hazardous expedition against Kāmarūpa. He subdues the king, compels him to pay tribute, and takes his daughter in marriage. The minister sends him on other dangerous expeditions, and he succeeds in all of them.

The minister himself worships Dharma and brings in Lāusēna to help him. He throws him into prison, gets his father and mother into his power, and agrees to release them only on condition that Lāusēna should cause the sun to rise on the west. Lāusēna proceeds to Hākanda, the westernmost point imaginable, beyond Haridvāra, beyond Mathurā, beyond Kurukṣētra, near the mountain where the sun sets. There he sacrifices his own person, divided into nine parts, in the fire, and all his followers do the same. One animal survives,—a dog. Dharma brings them to life, and makes the sun rise in the west. Lāusēna gets his parents released, and goes back to his kingdom. Dharma presents himself in his capital, and takes him and his followers to heaven.

This is the story of *Çrī-dharma-maṅgala*. It has the following striking points of resemblance with the story of the life of the Buddha.

1. The Buddha in the Tuṣita-heaven thinks of taking his last birth on earth.

Dharma in the highest heaven, thinks of sending some one on earth to propagate his worship.

2. The Buddha selects the best royal family for his birth.

Dharma selects the most virtuous royal personage to become the father of Kaçyapa-nandana on earth.

3. The Buddha's mother, Māyā-dēvī, gives birth to her noble son, while hanging from the branch of a tree. This tree is said to be a Pipal tree by some, an Açōka or a Çāla by others.

Rañjāvati, in order to get a son by the favour of Dharma, lays herself down on a *Çāla*—a plank with iron spikes in it. Now *Çālē bhar dēoyā* would apply equally to hanging by the branch of a Çāla tree and to lying oneself down on a *Çāla*, the planks with spikes driven into it.

4. The Buddha's mother dies immediately after the birth of her son.

Lāusēna's mother dies in order to get a son.

5. A storm disperses the crowd of attendants of the Buddha's mother, when he is born.

A storm precedes the obtaining of the boon by which Rañjā gets Lāusēna as her son.

6. The stories of athletic exercises bear very close resemblances to each other.

7. The story of the temptation of the Buddha divides itself into two parts, *viz.*, temptation by fierce demons, and temptation by beautiful damsels, or in other words by Māra-sēnā and by Māra-kanyā.

The story of the temptation of Lāusēna, too, divides itself into two parts—one, temptation by the tiger Kāmadala, which is a modern form of the word Māra-sēnā,—and the other, temptation by the ladies of Jāmati and the public women of Gōlāghāṭa.

8. The Buddha kills an elephant and sends it off several miles.

Lāusēna also kills an elephant.

9. While the Buddha was meditating under the Jambu tree, the progress of the seven ᅅᅅis (the constellation of the Great Bear) through the skies was stopped by his divine power.

Lāusēna compels the sun to rise in the west.

10. The Buddha obtains Nirvāᅅa and goes to the Sukhāvati heaven designed for Buddhas only.

Lāusēna, and all his followers, go in their terrestrial forms to the highest heaven of Dharma.

There are these and other points of resemblances between the two stories, but the points of difference are many, various and striking. In the whole of *Çri-dharma-maᅅgala*, the word Buddha does not occur. The only word of the Buddhist Trinity that occurs is Dharma;—not always that abstract idea which Buddhas designated by the word, but a great deity—the highest of all. On some occasions the deity Dharma is identified with the abstract quality of virtue or holiness, but such instances are rare. The stories of the Rāmāyaᅅa and Mahābhārata are cited in various instances, but not a single story about Buddhas or Bōdhisattvas. The writer of the work himself was a worshipper of Rāma, and so in his work Hanumat plays an important part as the attendant of Dharma. In fact there are many passages in the work in which Rāma, Viᅅᅅu, and Dharma appear to be all blended together into one, while in others Dharma is made superior to Viᅅᅅi, Viᅅᅅu and Çiva.

The Buddhist word *Nirvāᅅa* occurs only once, and that in the Buddhist sense of putting an end to transmigration.

From reasons already advanced in my previous papers, it would appear that Dharma worship is the same as the latest or the Taᅅtrik form of Buddha worship. It was confined to the very lowest classes of society—to Hāᅅis, ᅅōms, Pōds, Bāruis, &c. At the beginning of the last century a Brāhman poet well-versed in Hindū lore, observed this strange form of worship and wrote a great poem on it. He took the story from the worshippers and moulded it in his own fashion. The story of the Buddha's life, so simple in Pāli, got mixed up with legends and superstitions of twenty-five centuries and was then moulded by a Brāhman in such a manner that even the Buddha's name is not to be found in it. The Brāhman's work is certainly an echo of the Buddha's life, but it is a distant echo.